

Institutional rites and rights: a century of childhood

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And inaugural professorial lecture

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This is the text to explain a much shorter illustrated lecture.

Introduction

When Jacqueline Du Pré was 14 years old, I watched her playing Elgar's 'cello concerto. Examples of such early skill and maturity raise the questions:

What can adults do that children and young people cannot do?

What is the difference between childhood and adulthood?

This lecture will examine these key themes and the further questions they raise:

How have beliefs about childhood shaped children's lives over the past century?

How do these beliefs affect our views about children's rights and rites, and about education?

What part has the Institute played in these matters over the past 100 years, and might play over the next century?

First I will review meanings of words in the lecture title: Institution, Childhood, Rites and Rights.

Institutions - schools

'Institution' brings to mind buildings, such as the three-decker schools built after the 1870 Education Act. Schooling became compulsory from 1880 and swept working children away from the streets and farms, factories and mines, and into school. In the late 1960s, I taught at such a London school, with its playground on the roof. Bulldozers destroyed the nearby small houses and gardens, while tower blocks soared inexorably and noisily around us. They shut the sunshine forever out of the classrooms, and shut the children into small homes in the sky. Cars took over the streets even more, that once had been crowded with children playing and working.

'To institute' means to purpose, plan, design, establish, and set out in a formal order. Institution also means an established law or custom in political or social life. Much more than its outer shell, the building, an institution is the people and community within, their visions, beliefs and behaviours. Adults powerfully influence schools and yet the overwhelming majority of people within schools are the students. Schools are largely concerned with and assessed by the students' energy and activity. So what part do students play, and could they, and should they play in designing and organising the school-institutions in which they spend so great a part of their childhood?

State schools opened when all children and most adults (working and lower middle classes) were supposed to be subservient, seen and not heard. Eighteenth and nineteenth century working class people, who had made great efforts and sacrifices to educate themselves, opposed state schools on several grounds. Under a centralised, despotic state system, they thought, 'assuredly will the people degenerate into passive submission to injustice' (Lovett and Collins 1840:74) and become mere machine minders. Schools would 'destroy for many the love of learning [and with sanctions] annihilate the individuality and integrity of teacher and student alike' (Godwin 1797:112). Schools would support prejudice and extend childhood, they would discourage questioning and adult independence by trying to enforce 'perpetual pupillage'. They would strengthen government and church institutional power. Instead, in a non-statutory educational system, it was advocated, young and old people would have autonomy to control the content and pace of learning to 'go first and the master would follow' (Godwin 1797).

Photographs in the Institute of Education and the London Metropolitan Archives from the early 1900s onwards show rows of model children silently watching or obediently copying the lesson from the blackboard as over the decades, they were methodically prepared for their gendered future adult roles. Schools have moved from rows of benches to open-plan tables and ways of learning and relating, and from rigid rows of children watching one child do the experiment, to providing equipment for everyone to learn by doing. Trainee teachers at the Institute were once taught to draw set pictures on the blackboard for every child to copy exactly – more or less. Marion Richardson taught art here part time during 1924-1930. She led the movement away from demanding that children learn stiff copperplate writing towards an easier rounded style. She encouraged them to draw their own imaginative pictures and writing patterns. She respected children as creators, not simply as imitators. Marion Richardson summed up a key theme of this lecture, which concerns whether education and child-adult relationships are based on compulsion or mutual respect, are enforced or voluntary. In 1938, when working with Viennese colleagues through Save the Children, while they and their pupils were in such danger from the Nazis, Marion Richardson wrote:

Whenever people are sincere and free art can spring up...It is not too much to say that unless a relationship amounting to love exists between teacher and children, children's art, as it is now understood, is impossible' (Richardson 1938 quoted in Aldrich 2002:76-78). And perhaps real learning is then impossible too.

Some state schools during the century showed how children will create anywhere, given the chance, painting in corridors or under tables in crowded classrooms. Private schools tended to have more freedom to encourage children to be creative. In the 1930s at the Garden School in High Wycombe, for example, the girls conducted their music groups, acted plays, held school councils, and dug and helped to build their large swimming pool.¹ It is hard to imagine any British school today expecting children to be able to do this or allowing them to do so. What would health and safety and building regulations officers, insurance companies, DfES, LEAs, QCA, Ofsted, *The Sun*, and other risk-management authorities say?

Over the century, school-institutions have provided daily childcare, 'rescued' children from the streets and work, 'socialised' them, and prepared them for gainful employment or for motherhood. In a top-down process, adults have tended to 'deliver' skills and knowledge to the 'empty slates' that children were assumed to be. Some schools were violent places; D H Lawrence vividly recorded in his novels his own fears as a teacher during the 1900s when certain children were far from passive learners. The theme is frequently repeated in today's media, in claims by teaching unions' representatives, or the Ofsted inspector who said that the 'largest and worst primary school [was] like something out of Dante's inferno' (Riddell 2002).

The Institute of Education was founded largely to address problems of disorder and low learning levels in elementary schools, by improving the training of teachers (Aldrich 2002). The Institute has inspired and improved the skills of countless teachers over the century and across the world. To train individual teachers is a necessary but not, however, a sufficient solution to improving schools. The emphasis on training teachers without equal attention to other solutions, throughout

the century, may have contributed towards increasing rather than resolving problems of disaffection, among both school students and teachers.

It is questionable how far the skills of managing difficult classes and enabling them to realise their potential can be abstracted, identified, or transmitted during lectures to new teachers. Contemporary reports of fortress and failing schools indicate that it is not yet possible routinely to train all teachers to be good ones, which involves far more than learned techniques. Researchers deplore ‘the current waste of human resources caused by educational failure and social exclusion [that is] unacceptable in a modern society’ (Mortimore and Whitty 1999). Countless good ideas and, usually short-lived, successful teaching projects have never been gathered into a systematic, theory-based and research-based programme of minimum professional teaching standards, in contrast, for example, to research-based medical professional standards.

One reason for this failure is that the nature and relationships between the two institutions of school and of childhood tend to be misunderstood. The following popular phrases illustrate this misunderstanding.

When does learning begin?

- * ‘Life-long learning’ starts from the mid to late teens.
- * Schools teach ‘how to learn’ and about ‘the difference between right and wrong’.

School improvement – teamwork?

- * The head teacher, staff and governors listen to inspectors, consultants or researchers and then plan how to improve the school. The school improvement team audits student outcomes, the curriculum, pedagogy, management of learning, behaviour, resources and premises, and draws up an action plan (Stoll and Fink 1996).

Who are the workers?

- * To improve disadvantaged schools, teachers have to work extremely hard, way beyond normal efforts.
- * Outstanding teachers perform ‘magic’ and ‘alchemy’.
(for example, Brighouse and Woods 1999:86).

The missing element in these and innumerable other examples are the school students. Long before they arrive at school, children are expert learners and have mapped out most of their basic life-long knowledge and skills (Gardner 1993). Children learn about more ways to learn, but not basically ‘how to learn’ at school. The notion of ‘life-long learning from 14 +’ ignores the first years of life when most learning occurs. Although students are seldom recognised as formal members of school improvement teams, all school improvement relies mainly on their work and behaviour. Just as hardworking teachers are rightly praised, surely the students should be too. Paradoxically, the more highly a teacher is praised, the more it is implied that remarkable teachers somehow ‘produce’ high exam results against the grain, rather than working as partners with young people who are realising their own creative abilities. We might perhaps ask why so many teachers manage to stop their students from performing well.

The education literature tends to be curiously one-sided and concerned with adults performing but not relating. If marriage guidance similarly assumed a model of one active partner and one almost invisible partner, it would be unrealistic and useless. Yet much education literature ignores children and, for instance, how they train teachers. For decades, beginner teachers have been told, ‘You’ll learn how to teach soon enough “in the classroom”.’ This cliché reduces children and young people to an inanimate room, and is yet another device that erases them from education discourse. Donovan, aged 9, and newly arrived from Jamaica, was my main teacher. When he was bored he would step on to the tables and dance, to everyone’s delight. He helped me to learn to hold the class’s and his interest enough to divert him from dancing and the class from encouraging him.

To teach classes of young people is a social, political and institutional matter, as well as a personal one. So that to improve teaching also involves changing social institutions, and society, as well as the teachers. And this involves rethinking basic beliefs about childhood.

Institutions - childhood

Childhood itself is an institution with its established laws and formal customs. It is often thought of as a biological and inevitable stage of life. It is, however a social stage, lasting until around 7 to 12 years in some societies, or up to the mid-20s for some young adults in modern western societies. About 150 years ago, after a short infancy (infant meaning ‘without speech’) working class children were very much treated as adults - and most adults were treated rather as children. They had few rights or possessions, heavy workloads, little leisure, the anxieties and hardships of poverty. As far as we can tell, many had strong ties of affection and loyalty. Childhood has since gradually been subdivided into babies, toddlers, pre-schoolers and so on including adolescents – they were first officially classified in 1904 (Hall 1904).

Children are real living people. But childhood is a set of ideas about what children are and ought to be like, and how they should behave and relate to adults. These ideas change very much over time. Near our London school, mosaics on the library walls recorded how Chaucer’s pilgrims set out from that street over 600 years ago, with their highly educated young squire. Around 2,000 years ago, some local families lived in the newly imported Roman style. Today, pearly princes and princesses undertake regal duties in the area. Incidentally, the images record waves of immigration, from Italy, France and the Caribbean, each wave bringing new ideas about childhood and education.

Children are so confined today, that it is often assumed that they cannot, and should not, take an active part in their communities. Less than a century ago, their lives were far more closely woven in ‘adult’ society, and still are today in the poorer majority world. Children aged 4 or 5 years would go alone on errands across a busy city, use public transport, shop and barter, or ramble in the countryside (Ward 1994). Today, millions of young children ably help their parents, by working in homes, farms and streets. In war-torn, AIDS-torn Africa, children head households (Muscroft 1999:74) as 12 year old Sophia Ingibire Tuyisenge’s story tells. She is caring for her two sisters and despite many problems

is ‘coping just fine’ (McFerran 2003:66). In Britain today, thousands of children aged from 3 years upwards help to care for a sick or disabled relative (Aldridge and Becker 2002). The point here is not *whether* this should happen, but that it *does* happen, and shows young children’s strengths and competencies. Perhaps children are happier today, with more toys, books, games, clothes, comfortable homes, food, education and care services planned for them. We cannot know. Certainly they are lonelier with so many fewer children per family and per street, and are far more confined. Fashions in childcare swing from harsh to indulgent, from fairly loose to tight control (Hardyment 1984). Today, alongside indulgence, children are often controlled more rigidly than ever before.

Just as women’s views are largely missing from history, children’s views are almost wholly absent. Instead we have adults’ records, discussions and images of childhood (Hendrick 2000). What was it like for 5-year-old to sit still hour after hour on cramped benches? How did those older boys and girls feel, who were beaten for being ‘thick’ and ‘idle’, but who could do fairly skilled work that would bring in money their family desperately needed? And what did older sisters in large families think about being ‘taught’ to do tasks they had been doing at home for years?

Local doors have closed, while virtual and global ones have opened throughout the past century for western childhood, more than ever before. Today, children may not know their next-door neighbours, partly because of current stranger-danger fears, but they may know lots about rain forests or space travel, and have perhaps been to Florida or Pakistan. In Derby in 1902, Margaret aged 5 years took a pushchair across the city to collect her sister Elizabeth, aged 3 years, who had been in hospital for weeks. The matron was annoyed that their mother had not come, but assumed that the girls were old enough to go home on their own.² Cities were dangerous places then, with plenty of horses and other traffic, muddy cobbled roads and no zebra crossings or traffic lights. Myths have grown up that children cannot and should not do these things. Researchers ask to whom does childhood belong, when parents and teachers assume they must organise and oversee almost every moment of children’s lives (Shamgar-Handelman 1994).

Adulthood is assumed to mean being strong and informed, reliable and wise, and childhood means being vulnerable and ignorant, unreliable and foolish. Schools are planned on this assumption and constantly reinforce it. A curriculum is ‘delivered’ to children, as letters are posted into letterboxes, until children turn into adults. These institutionalised ‘laws and customs’ seem too obvious and natural to be worth noting, But are they true?

Institutions versus individuals

An old debate concerns how much we are free individuals, expressing our own personality, fulfilling our own aims. Alternatively, are we formed by institutions, by the weight of rules, routines, traditions, and gender, age, class and ethnic roles? Institutions take on their own dynamics, such as the anxiety and mistrust felt between senior and junior people (Menzies Lyth 1989), which are amplified in settings where adults control children. Do and should schools try simply to shape children more or less into the models that society requires, like plastic gnome factories? As generations of children flow through a school, do they make and alter

the school, or does the school make and alter them? An analogy to the institution-individual debate is the river, such as the Thames, and whether rivers alter their channels or are shaped by them. Cyril Burt's (1937:97) map of the Thames basin and the London districts purports to show how the incidence of mental deficiency correlates with poverty rates. He thereby connected an assessed intelligence, assumed heredity and socio-economic background into 'post code IQ rates' as inexorable institutional determinants that diminish agency (Goodey 2003).

However, institutions and individuals interact, each affecting the other in varying ways. Institutions have perhaps been portrayed as over-dominant by authors who could not see children as agents. Just as rivers pass through floods or droughts, generations of individuals and groups have greater or less impact on their institutions. A century of childhood is an infinite canvas to cover, and this lecture simply highlights a few examples and indicates some underlying patterns. Examples of children who have exerted wide ranging political power include those in Soweto who helped to end apartheid in South Africa, and street children in South America (Hart 1997), in Senegal (Muscroft 1999:81) and in India (Ennew 2002) who have influenced governments' policies to protect them. Working children in Rajasthan share in planning the curriculum and inspecting their night schools, which are attended by 2500 children aged 6-14 years. Every child can vote for the Children's Parliament, which manages the whole system including the quality of the teaching (John 2000). Danish, Dutch and German young people can play much more creative roles in planning their education than British students are allowed to do (Hannam 1999; Davies and Kirkpatrick 2000). In London, the 1998 Greater London Assembly Act set out the Mayor's 8 strategies with no mention of the capital's 1.62 million Londoners aged under 18 years. However, young Londoners at the Office of Children's Rights Commissioner for London have worked with the GLA to reshape policies across the city, and the GLA children's policy was launched in April 2003.

Rites

A major way for institutions to establish and strengthen themselves is through rites, from minor routines to solemn ceremonies, the customs or habits that mark out groups of people. Institutional life is shaped by events or rites, and by time rather than space. Rites literally mean the custom or way to go or to flow, linking rites to rivers. Rites bring people together, mark their shared history, and enable community life to flow through institutional channels over the years, although rites tend to over-emphasise past, conservative traditions, those comfortable well-used deeper channels. They may therefore deter institutions from venturing in new directions, in the view that 'We have always done things this way.'

The rites of childhood have changed greatly, though they spread across the centuries too. Centuries are not sharply cut off from one another, and children's changing rites show links between the distant past and the far-off future. The Institute of Education has a millennium longitudinal study of babies born in 2000. One of these children, Amy, is likely to live into the twenty-second century. But she enjoys books such as *Peter Rabbit* and *Just-So Stories* published in 1902, while her sister Harriet texts on her mobile phone and surfs the internet, twenty-first century style. Their great grandfather would be 100 this year, and his parents lived well back into the nineteenth century. So just four or five generations could span

four centuries, mingling old and new childhood rites, games and stories, as each generation successively passes through childhood into adulthood.

Rights

Rites and rights are concerned with correct, institutionalised procedures and relationships. The Old English notion of right, of what is just, due, equal and true, the opposite of wrong, was set deeply into social institutions and the moral and legal social order and ceremony, such as in rightful claims to property, authority or privilege.

The concept of individual rights began in the sixteenth century as the ‘natural’ and ‘inalienable’ rights of property owning men (Locke 1690; Kant 1796). These were gradually extended to working men, civil rights for ethnic minorities, women’s rights, disability rights and gay rights. Rights are a formal means of balancing tensions between institutions and individuals, between liberty, solidarity and equality. The rights of everyone are widely respected and endorsed in democracies, except for people aged under 18 years. They have an ambiguous place, for example, in Human Rights documents that declare the right of everyone to work, to vote and to found a family. Are children anyone or no one? Should they have rights?

Concerned about starving European children, Eglantine Jebb promoted the first international Charter of Children’s Rights in 1914, on their rights to basic goods and to protection from harm and neglect. These so called Provision and Protection Rights can equally well be understood under old and non-controversial headings of children’s welfare, needs or best interests. The United Nation’s (UN) first Declaration of the Rights of Children in 1959 included protection rights against exploitation and discrimination. The UN Year of the Child in 1979 led on to many initiatives, including ten years of writing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC), which added the third ‘P’: Participation Rights (see tables 1-4).

The three Ps usefully subdivide children’s rights, although these rights also overlap across them. The three Ps also reveal a major problem in much of the education literature, in that it concentrates on adults’ responsibilities to protect and provide for children and young people, but tends to ignore children’s equally vital participation rights and contributions. Tables 1-4 briefly summarise most of the Convention’s 54 articles.

Table 1. UNCRC provision rights to:

Care necessary for the child’s well-being

Competent standards of care

The highest attainable standards of health and necessary health treatment

Periodic review for looked-after children

Adequate standard of living for physical, mental, spiritual and social development

Compulsory and free primary education

Education that is preparation for responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality and friendship among all people

Rest and leisure, play, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts

Table 2. UNCRC protection rights from:
Physical or mental violence,
Injury or abuse,
Neglect or negligent treatment,
Maltreatment or exploitation,
Cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment
Unlawful deprivation of liberty,
Discrimination.
Children should not be in prisons with adults.
There are rights to the promotion of physical or psychological recovery and social reintegration of child victims after neglect or abuse, cruel treatment or armed conflict

Table 3. UNCRC participation rights include:
The right to life and survival
To a name, an identity, a nationality
To contact with parents and family
To respect for the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background, humanity and inherent human dignity.
The child's right to express views freely in all matters affecting the child
The views of the child to be given due weight according to the age and ability of the child
The opportunity to be heard directly or through a representative during proceedings that affect the child
Freedom of expression and information
Of thought, conscience and religion
Of association and peaceful assembly
Disabled children should be able enjoy a full and decent life in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community with the fullest possible social inclusion.

Table 4. Important CRC articles

also urge governments:

- * To encourage the mass media to disseminate ...material of social and cultural benefit to the child...that promote social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.
- * To ensure wide publicity about the UN Convention to adults and children alike.

Respect for children's rights

A Convention is the strongest kind of international treaty. The UNCRC is by far the most widely endorsed treaty ever, ratified by 192 governments who thereby promise to implement it in law, policy and practice, and to report regularly to the UN on progress in so doing. Only Somalia that has no government and the United States have not ratified the UNCRC. Given this unprecedented almost universal support, how can children's rights be controversial?

Many people think of modern rights in terms of 'Keep out! Don't interfere with me. I have the right to do whatever I like, as long as it doesn't harm anyone else.' The extreme example is the (North American) property owner who claims the right to shoot any intruder. In this view, no wonder children's rights are unpopular, a

nightmare vision of the selfish unmanageable child, careless of parental love, and of responsibility, duty, loyalty or concern for others.

However, the UN Convention rights are quite different.

- They are about necessities, such as clean water, not luxuries.
- Rights are not absolute but conditional on the best attainable standards, on the child's best interests, on national law and security, public order, health and morals, and the avoidance of harming anyone.
- They are about reasonable standards that can be willed and enforced (such as to prevent cruel neglect, but not to demand love or happiness), while stating the importance to every child of living 'in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding'.
- They support families, and parents' responsibilities, rights and duties.
- Rights are shared, and concern solidarity, equality, social justice and fair distribution: 'our rights' not 'my rights'.
- They respect the inherent worth and dignity and the inalienable rights of all members of the human family,
- They are aspirational, promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedoms and laying foundations for justice and peace in the world.
- They set out principled yet flexible standards.
- They are tools for change through regular local and national audit and planning and through governments' regular reports to the UN on progress in implementing the UNCRC rights in law, policy and practice.

Rights are often seen as zero-sum: the more you have, the less I have. But equal rights are more often about win-win. Everyone benefits when communities have clean water and play areas. Many parents oppose children's rights because they expect to be the first to lose if their own child has more rights. The opposite can happen. I stayed in Finland with a family in a town where school was closed for 8 year olds every Tuesday. The mother, Paivi, was a child psychiatrist. She took it for granted, like all the other parents, that 8 year old Tulla would stay at home on her own all day or go out to play with friends when she chose, including on dark winter evenings. Finnish children have more rights and responsibilities than British children, which can make them and their parents freer and happier. In Britain, after-school childcare excessively restricts children's freedoms of peaceful 'association and assembly' to wander freely around their district and play with friends when and where they choose. It is also a huge drain on the family budget and one great cause of child poverty. Young children's inherent vulnerability is stretched out to be ascribed to all children and young people in an imposed structural vulnerability (Lansdown 1994). Older children are then not allowed to exercise their rights and responsibilities. Over the twentieth century, countless women have entered the British labour market by doing many kinds of paid childcare. They tend to be very hostile to news that children in most other countries competently do much of this work themselves. Adults fear to lose their income from child-work, and their status founded on an invented, institutionalised childhood dependence. So taking children's rights seriously involves tackling many vested interests and economies.

It is hard to see how anyone who has read the UN Convention could object to most children's rights. And yet these rights are violated on a massive scale. Tables 5-7 give a few from very many examples.

Table 5 International violations of children's rights

- 1 in 4 children lives in poverty
 - Over 100 million primary school age children have no schooling
 - 1.1 billion people have no safe water
 - 2.4 billion people have no adequate sanitation
 - 100 million young children each year have vitamin A deficiency, a leading cause of blindness, illness and death
 - 2 million children each year die of preventable disease
 - 40 million births each year are not registered
- (Bellamy 2003)

Table 6 Violations of children's rights in the UK

- 1 in 3 children lives in poverty
 - 26% of recorded rape victims are children
 - 30,300 children were on child protection registers in 1999
 - Each year about six children are killed by strangers and about 80 by family or adult 'friends'
 - Each year >40,000 children are killed or injured in road accidents
 - 20% of children and young people have mental health problems
 - African-Caribbean children are 6 times more likely than others to be excluded from school
 - 1 in 5 people aged 16-25 years experiences homelessness
 - 75% of looked-after children leave school without formal qualifications
 - Young care leavers are
 - 50 times more likely to spend time in prison,
 - 60 times more likely to be homeless,
 - 88 times more likely to be involved in drug use than their peers
 - 2,300 prisoners were aged 15-17 in 2001
 - 2,168 children had their mother in prison in 1997
- (Bradshaw 2000; NSPCC 2000; Hood 2002)

Table 7 Violations of children's rights in Greater London

- 43 % of children live in poverty (in households with below 50% of average income)
 - 2,480 child pedestrians were killed or injured in traffic accidents in 1999
 - 4,809 children were on child protection registers
 - 10,402 children were looked-after by their Local Authority in 2000
 - Numbers of children admitted to secure units doubled in 1997-8
- (Hood 2002)

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (1995, 2003) has criticised the UK Government, for example, for not allowing children to appeal or even to speak to school exclusion hearings. It exhorts the UK Government to improve the education of teachers especially about children's rights, and to keep its promise to publicise the Convention to 'adults and children alike' article 42.

There are signs of change. At last the Government is requiring all its services to listen to children (Children and Young People Unit 2002). Ofsted inspectors, for example, must consult children. However, this exercise could easily be tokenistic and misleading, worse than useless. Respectful and realistic methods need to be adopted for the vast range of surveys and consultancies now being promoted with children and young people (Borland *et al* 2001). Yet is the Government wise or misguided to seek children's views, thereby respecting the key participation article 12 right?

The right to have rights and to have a say

Provision and protection rights are usually accepted as beneficial, necessary and unconditional. Participation or autonomy rights and freedoms of choice for children tend to be seen as separate and controversial, although all the rights are integrally linked. However, participation and decision making rights tend to be accorded to people who have four main strengths:

- 1 The ability to understand and process information;
- 2 The competence to exercise their rights reasonably and to make reliable decisions taking account of lasting values;
- 3 The personal autonomy or resolve to stand by their decisions without blaming others for mistakes or failures;
- 4 The 'public' autonomy or the assurance that other people and the state will respect their autonomy and rights.

Traditionally, adults have been assumed to have these strengths, and children to lack them. Yet views on children's competencies are changing, as mentioned earlier. For example, my research about when children can be informed and wise enough to consent to surgery questioned 120 people aged 8 to 15 years having major surgery, their parents and health care staff (Alderson 1993). On average the young interviewees had already had four or five operations, so they were intensely aware about what they were undertaking. I found that competence linked to experience and not to age. In each year group, from 8 years upwards, some children were seen by adults and by themselves as:

- 1 Being able to process complex and distressing information;
- 2 Being competent to reflect and to make reasonable reliable decisions about proposed treatment while taking account of long-term values;
- 3 Having personal autonomy, courage and resolve to make and stand by their decision;
- 4 Having the 'public' autonomy, in that their right to decide was respected in practice.

Can children younger than 8 years exercise their UN Convention article 12 and 13 rights: 1) to be informed, 2) to form and express views, and 3) to influence matters that affect them? English law (*Gillick v Wisbech and W Norfolk HA* [1995]) goes beyond the Convention to a fourth right: to be the main decider in personal decisions (for a review of the law see Alderson and Montgomery 1996). There is growing evidence that very young children can make informed and responsible decisions, which parents, play specialists, planners and other adults take seriously (for a review, see Alderson 2000b).

Children with serious long-term conditions cooperate with their treatment and share in controlling their diet. Their health is often in their own hands when adults are not present, such as when friends are sharing sweets and children with diabetes, aged only 4 years, refuse to take their share and manage to be different without losing friendships. Other examples are when a group of children aged 3 to 8 years considerably improved the adults' plans to renovate their housing estate (Newson 1995), or when children in nurseries plan, budget for and carry out shared activities (Miller 1996).

When children's wisdom is respected, it is possible to see ways in which even premature babies can help adults to listen and to learn from the babies how to care for them more sensitively and appropriately (Als 1999). As our current research is finding (Alderson et al 2002-4), in 'baby-led' units, the noise and lighting levels are kept low. Babies are individually 'nested' in positions that each one finds most comfortable. This avoids the outstretched startled position and gathers the 'competent' baby into 'organised' and self-comforting positions. Baby-informed care promotes the babies' deep sleep, their growth and health. 'Reading' the babies' responses involves adults in learning and responding to their complex body language (Murray and Andrews 2000).

Extraordinarily, human babies are sometimes dismissed as 'blank slates', whereas baby lambs are not. Yet human babies are born with many competencies and capacities. Their genes and instincts are less determinist than potential. Within 5 months of conception, all the 80 billion neurons for the mature cerebral cortex have been formed. At peak growth times, 250,000 neurons are 'born' each minute. The cells grow, migrate (by about 7 months gestation), mature, and then are selectively ablated, as the infant brain develops into the fully integrated adult brain. Synapses, which communicate between neurons, develop during gestation and infancy through great 'overproduction' and later, crucially, through 'pruning'. Adults may have 10 to the power of 14 cortical synapses, 40% fewer than they had in infancy. Insufficient pruning is associated with learning difficulties (Fox et al 1999). We are only just beginning to understand the amazing neonatal neurology, which is one part of realising babies' and older children's capacities.

Children have plenty of interesting and useful views about their education. We have found them bursting with ideas to contribute to group discussions about their rights (or lack of rights) at school (Alderson and Arnold 1999), and how they could, and have, improved their ordinary and special schools, such as through their skilled peer mediation and conflict resolution (Highfield School 1997) and their respectful inclusiveness Cleves School 1999). From hundreds of examples, there is Susan, determined to be the first person in her family to go to university (Alderson and Goodey 1998:119-20). She insisted on moving from her local reception class, when 4 years old, where she felt 'smothered and mothered', to be a weekly boarder at a special school. She is blind though, like many children at that school, she is exceptionally far-sighted about life, values and, for some, politics, which they debate with great enthusiasm. Susan recalled how, 'Mum had to drag me screaming down the [school] drive because I didn't want to go home.' Unlike many of her peers, Susan managed to keep a close friend at home. At weekends, by the time Susan was 10, they would go off on the local buses to the shops together. Susan thought carefully about her secondary school choices and visited several

schools to look round them. One was too rigid and unfriendly, she thought. Her local schools were not academic enough, but if she left her boarding school the LEA would force her to attend one of these. Yet she felt 'stifled' at her present school in a small class, and wanted a change. 'It's a really, really difficult decision,' she said. She decided to board at her present school and during the day to attend a nearby public school (on a very large split campus), sharing a liaison teacher with two other visually impaired students. 'It would be a struggle but I would get the hang of it,' she decided. Her father wrote a report explaining the decision for the LEA who approved Susan's choice. A year later she was very pleased with her decision, academically and socially.

In some ways, Susan was the only person who could make a fully informed decision that took account of her experiences, values and plans. I have given an example of an academically very successful girl, but I could give many other examples including girls and boys with average abilities and with learning difficulties, who talked about their considerable insight into their own and their families' and friends' interests. As already mentioned, their understanding did not correlate with their age or assessed intelligence but with their experience.

Institutionalising childhood within compulsory schooling

Ironically, health care professionals who treat children's bodies have a far better record of respecting children's understanding and decision-making, than teachers who are primarily concerned with children's minds (see, for example, differences between education and health chapters in Franklin 2002). It may be harder for teachers working with groups of children to listen to them than for health practitioners who often care individually for sick children. Yet this cannot wholly explain the way children's views have been so much ignored in Britain by teachers, school management, education providers and policy makers, teacher training, and even by almost every lecture in this centenary series at the Institute of Education. A strange omission, since for every teacher influenced by this Institute, probably well over 100 children have been affected.

British adults from any class expect to be treated respectfully, at least in theory - quite unlike 1900, but schools still tend to cling to self-fulfilling Victorian prejudices about social class, ethnic origin, inherited ability (Gillborn and Youdell 2000) and submissive childhood. Even supposedly progressive 'child-centred' approaches tend to assume a pedagogic notion of the child as an unformed, somewhat disembodied, learning mind, quite remote from many real children and their concerns (Mayall 1996).

Today, childhood is controlled and confined into childcare and education institutions, and surveyed, regulated and tested at unprecedented levels (Donzelot 1979; Rose 1990; Qvortrup 1994). 'Paradoxically, as factory employment declines...schools seem ever more eager to embrace many of the least attractive attributes of the sweatshop': clocking in, bells, high security, uniforms, intense regulation and testing of outputs (Jeffs 1995). There are also the Whitehall micromanagement, privatising of schools into the control of government-appointed business boards and companies, enforced compliance through tests, league tables, and naming and shaming, that all set students, teachers and schools against one another, and undermine their resourceful initiative (Jeffs 2002:50-1). Schools

became less democratic when hundreds of student governors were sacked (Children's Legal Centre 1987) when the 1986 Education Act excluded all governors aged under 18 years.

It is now a crime to be young in some ways, a crime for young people to be on the streets during school time (Crime and Disorder Act 1998, section 16; Home Office 2003). Some schools use Connexion 'smart cards' to 'swipe' students into every lesson; local businesses can access these cards, contrary to the 1998 Human Rights Act requirements for privacy and confidentiality (ARC 2001; see also Spencer 2000; Fortin 2002). Amid these undemocratic measures, education *for* citizenship, not *of* citizens, is now compulsory in secondary schools, with an emphasis on teaching about 'adult' systems of democracy. The guidance ignores the serious problems of counterproductive attempts to teach about democracy through undemocratic systems or token school councils, as young people discussed during our research about civil rights in schools. In contrast, democratic schools encourage many students' enthusiastic engagement with improving their school (Cullingford 1992; Alderson and Arnold 1997; Alderson 2000a; Highfield 1997).

The mainstream sociology of institutions tends to ignore schools and instead cites armies, prisons (Katz and Kahn 1966) and mental hospitals (Goffman 1968) as the most controlling institutions, although researchers who have studied schools have been amazed at head teachers' control 'unknown in our experience of studying management in a wide range of undertakings' (Torrington and Weightman 1988:8). This comment was made 15 years ago before many recent measures appeared.

How would adults react to being treated as many school students are?

We could review a typical secondary school day. Nowhere safe to leave your coat and belongings, which must be carried everywhere. Regular crowded mass treks from one part of the campus to another. Queuing to wait, sometimes in the rain, until a teacher arrives to unlock doors. Up to a quarter of your time taken up with silent queuing and marching (Griffith 1998). Much reduced break times. Petty rules about uniform, jewellery and hints of individual expression, that in turn stop freedom of speech: 'We cannot have a school council because all they want to talk about is uniform and they cannot do that,' some teachers reported (Alderson 2000a, c). Britain and Malta are the only European countries to have uniforms (Hannam 1999) indicating that they are not essential.

Would you care to arrive home and hear your partner say, 'Your boss has just phoned to tell me you broke that agreement I signed with her. You were late back from lunch and she says I must stop you watching television for a week.' You might reply, 'But I was helping a friend whose mobile was stolen.' 'Tough,' your partner will say, 'I don't want any more lame excuses. Now get on with that work you have to give in tomorrow.' And so you labour on through a 6 or 7 day week that far exceeds the European limits for adults' working hours. With breakfast clubs and after school clubs, even young children may spend 50 hours a week at school. Most children would prefer not to attend the clubs, if they had the choice (Smith 2000; Smith and Barker 2002). Many children are not happy about the growing alliances between home and school, and mothers being turned into teachers, and they would prefer there to be a clear gap (Allred et al 2002). By the

way, you are not paid a penny, your pocket money may be stopped too sometimes, and your work however skilful, complicated, hard, interesting, beautiful or original, does not count as 'work', but as mere practising or learning for your benefit (Morrow 1994). You cannot have the satisfaction of feeling that you are helping or benefiting others; adults insist that they help you.

Teachers can act as claimant, witness, judge and jury if students are accused of misdemeanours. Despite this complicated overlapping of roles that the justice system exists to separate, children may be punished and even excluded without routine means of appeal or fair arbitration (UNCRC 2002). Home-School Agreements are the reverse of the legal contract, which is an informed and unpressured agreement freely negotiated between equal partners. The Agreements appear to assume that any alleged misdemeanour will be entirely the child's fault, and not possibly be linked to mistakes or other problem in the school. Parents who support their child can be criminalized, fined and even sent to prison.

Mothers of 4-year-olds have told me about class teachers advising them to 'ground' their children to punish alleged inattention and misbehaviour. During small discussion groups about rights in schools (Alderson and Arnold 1999), some children mentioned their fear that when teachers call their parents into school to complain to them, 'my mum will beat me up,' 'my dad whacks me'. So although the 1993 Education Act banned physical punishment in state schools, this has been exported, in some cases, to the home, rather than abolished. Children are the only members of British society who can, by law, be hit, as if somehow they do not mind as much as adults would, or as if 'a smack is the only language they can understand'. Yet research shows that young children can feel deeply hurt and rejected (Willow and Hyder 1998). The dire state of the toilets in many schools is another sign of disrespect for bodies that adults' institutions would not tolerate. A colleague who read a draft of this paper commented,

'My daughter aged 9 has to sign a book whenever she goes to the toilet at school and then sign back in. The teachers want to find out who is vandalising the toilets. She won't go to the toilet in case she gets blamed and because they are unpleasant. She won't drink so she is dehydrated but longing to go to the loo. How can she learn?'

Instead of making all the children suffer when a few offend, another approach is to involve everyone in planning and carrying out positive solutions. This often requires some funding, and effective school councils see budgets and have some share in deciding how certain funds are spent.

Despite all the discouragements in schools, most young people do work very hard and creatively. They enjoy at least some of their schoolwork, and they rate time at school to be with their friends very highly, especially as there are so few free public spaces where they are encouraged to meet outside school. As they become older and more competent, however, their enjoyment and interest fall (McCall et al. 2001:85; Alderson 2000; Pollard et al 1997). Yet we treat all school students as if most of them, instead of only a relatively tiny minority, were potential truants, by making schooling compulsory and enforced with heavy sanctions. How have we arrived at this state? The next section traces a few influential ideas.

The London University setting

In the bustle of nearby shops and theatres, traffic and tourists, it is not always obvious that we are in a square mile or so packed with London University institutions that are filled with research and teaching activity, history and ideas. Many of these influence past and present work at this Institute. For example, from next door at University College, two men profoundly shaped our current concepts of childhood into assumptions that would have been unthinkable 200 years ago.

Jeremy Bentham's (stuffed) body still sits there, though he lived from 1745 to 1832 before the college opened. He designed the panopticon, from which unseen guards could minutely observe every detail of their prisoners' day. His notions of moral surveillance have grown to influence the way mothers and teachers and other professionals expect to keep children constantly under their watchful gaze (Foucault 1967; Donzelot 1979; Rose 1990).

Bentham also shared in discrediting moral principles, as too confusing and outdated. He sought to replace principles with the utilities of pain and pleasure. This has altered morality from making choices that are worthwhile, fair or honourable in themselves, into calculating harm and benefit, cost, risk and outcomes (Bentham 1789). The new ethics of utilitarianism now tends to dominate public and private life as if we have always thought that way. Today's obsession with outcomes is especially oppressive for children when childhood is valued so much for its effects on future adult earning power and not for itself.

Frances Galton established the Eugenics Centre at University College, now the Galton Centre. He took calculation further and coined the word statistics – measuring the state - and he developed the bell curve of normal distribution and the notion of a measurable intelligence (Kaye 1997; Goodey 2003). During the past hundred years, numbers and statistics have widely replaced words, and are seen as more reliable, objective, trustworthy forms of knowledge for strangers to share, and a correct currency of communication between them; most communication today is between strangers (Porter 1995; Oakley 2000). Galton's work was developed at the Institute of Education, for example by Cyril Burt, and it underlies the vast industry of testing and statistically classifying children today.

Another quite recent concept is 'normal'. Until the 1820s, 'norm' was a carpenter's set square (OED). The idea of reducing children to uniform characteristics that could be measured and assessed against assumed norms has developed fairly recently. Having collected all children into schools, local authorities were unable to meet their diverse needs, and required methods to sort and classify them – and to transfer blame on to them for not fitting in. Children have come to be perceived not as each a unique individual in personal networks, knowing and known by their family and neighbours, but as abstracted numbers, measured for how far they fit or fail the norm required by the local schools or by remote examination boards. And rather than directly assessing the benefits and dis-benefits that schools offer, such as by asking children for their considered views and then thoughtfully acting on these to improve schools, instead, we use aspects of children's performance as the proxy object and tool of measurement. While some examinations and course work offer great opportunities for young people to show their knowledge and skills, the

content and methods of other tests do not. With some of these, it is as if supermarkets assess their success on how neatly the customers park their trolleys. For example, with the current high levels of private coaching, it is invalid to assess teachers' effectiveness through children's SATs, which ignore the coaching variable.

At this Institute, Susan Isaacs who warned teachers to leave testing to the experts (1932:11-13) and Cyril Burt wrote kindly, sympathetically and insightfully about children. Yet they were also intent on their own agenda, rather than the children's. Burt's dismissal of a 'dullard' girl's drawing of two perspectives of a face (1937:350), for example, contrasts with the admiration that a fairly similar work by Picasso might evoke. A major agenda at the Institute was to establish child development psychology as a respected science, on which local authorities could rely - and pay - for testing children and training teachers. The Swiss psychologist Piaget's concepts of age and stage development appeared to offer the necessary scientific and theoretical foundation for child psychology. Burt's and Isaacs's colleagues and successors, such as Richard Peters, Professor of Philosophy from 1962, shared their admiration for Piaget and also the general concern about how cheap mass education could provide 'adequate avenues for self-realisation in a way which does not involve a depreciation in the quality of education available for those who are gifted enough to benefit from it' (Peters 1974:87). As for those not 'gifted' enough to benefit, the concept of 'uneducable' was only abandoned when the right of every child to school education became legal through the 1971 Education Act.

Whether the Institute initiated or reflected, reinforced or developed fashionable ideas, it certainly furthered the trends towards treating children as numbers, in order to test, measure and stream them according to a complicated construction of their Piagetian development. Many children were excluded into special schools for administrative, economic and eugenic reasons, eugenic in the strict sense of good breeding so that 'defective' children would not meet and marry into the general population (Quicke et al 1990; Kevles 1995). The legacy of all these activities includes a whole language and grammar of developmentalism, which accords the active achieving verbs to adults and the passive receiving ones to children. It assumes that the mind's development is as genetically programmed as the body's, and it traces the supposedly inexorable milestones and stages up the slow ascent from zero at birth to the endpoint of civilised adulthood. Developmental theories still dominate popular and academic thinking, besides courses and library shelves at the Institute, and probably the views of many people who read this paper.

International childhood studies

Critical thinking about childhood has quite a long history (Dewey 1956; Aries 1962; Holt 1975; Donaldson 1978; Bluebond-Langner 1978). It took on a new life with a European-wide study (Qvortrup et al 1994), and there are now childhood studies centres around the world for teaching and research (Hill and Tisdall 1997; Smith et al 2000). From the 1980s, a range of social scientists working in sociology, anthropology, social psychology, social policy, geography, economics, history, philosophy, who had formerly perceived children as pre-social beings outside their remit, began to study children seriously in two main ways that differ from developmental psychology: method and theory.

Methods

Over much of the twentieth century, psychologists have tended to:

- observe children with methods based on an animal model of research,
- examine them in laboratory conditions isolated from their everyday context,
- give them artificial tests and hypothetical questions,
- test them against norms,
- design questionnaires about the children for adults to answer
- use adult-centred units of analysis such as the family,
- search for causes for children's behaviour,
- propose a scientific universal model of child development.

In contrast, childhood studies tends to:

- observe and also, crucially, talk with children as people,
- meet them in their everyday contexts and relationships where they have expert knowledge,
- avoid tests and assessments and adult-assumed norms,
- try to see children's perspectives and how they organise and make sense of their lives as rational agents, instead of relying wholly on their parents' or teachers' views,
- see the child as the unit of analysis, such as finding out how resources are often very unequally shared out within the family or the school,
- search for motives and contextual reasons for children's behaviour,
- compare greatly varying childhoods around the world, and especially note the 'adult' competencies of so many children in the poorer majority world.

Theories

The use of mixed methods of collecting data (see, for example, Christensen and James 2000; Clark and Moss 2001) has produced a new understanding of many 'amazing, precocious' children and young people who do not fit Piaget's stages at all. In order to understand these findings, therefore, childhood studies examines traditional theories of childhood and how adults' perceptions of children and young people are intensely shaped by the adults' prejudices, values and interests. Methods and theories from feminist research have been useful here. Feminists criticised men's assumptions that only the male public world counted in social science and it also served everyone's best interests. 'Not so,' said many women, 'We often have quite different views and interests.' Similarly adult-centred social science has often ignored and misrepresented children and their interests.

So besides studying children themselves, childhood studies is much concerned with *how* children have been studied in the past, and what theories and methods have produced the misleading underestimations about children. It is as if children have been trapped into the prism of childhood, of confining beliefs and practices, which adults and children construct and reconstruct (James and Prout 1997). When they assume that their local current version of childhood is the only true one, researchers tend to see, report and reinforce the particular prism images of childhood that their prejudices reflect back at them, the child as clever or stupid, weak or strong (Bradley 1989; Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers 1992). The newer research is reflexive, in that it involves thinking about how our own

biographies and values and subjective perceptions inevitably influence our research (this is true of all research). There is also new research interest in examining how our subjective influences can increase or decrease our insight into children's views and experiences.

Childhood researchers vary but they tend to endorse the following values. Children's lives are worthwhile and matter now in the present, not simply for their future effects. Children are not merely developing and practising, they are also accomplishing and contributing competently (Hutchby and Moran Ellis 1998). Adulthood is not the perfect endpoint after childhood. Instead we all go on changing and learning and making mistakes throughout our lives, and therefore childhood and adulthood are in many ways similar and equally important parts of our lives (Lee 2001). The value of life cannot be measured by its length but by its quality. In our neonatal study, when one premature baby died, the adults agreed, 'Her life was so important. She loved and was loved and that is what really matters,' and these short lives can have life-long effects on other people.

Although as we grow older we become more experienced, and informed, and perhaps more wise, though current international politics cast serious doubts on this hope, children too can be profoundly experienced, informed and wise. Most western children are too carefully protected to encounter serious dangers, but researchers who are fortunate enough to listen to children who know about danger, such as refugees (Candappa 2002), or those who face life-threatening illness discover how intensely experienced young children can become and how maturely they cope with complex and distressing information and decisions. As one nurse said, 'their understanding of life and death knocks spots off' the adults' knowledge (Alderson 1993: 162).

Do young children, however, merely parrot and imitate? A long erudite chapter that analyses a story by a 2 year old reveals the complex social understanding elegantly encoded in the story (Sacks 1991). The story is: 'The baby cried. The mommy picked it up.' Readers usually assume that 'it' means the baby who was picked up by his or her own mother with the motive to comfort the baby, because that is what babies and mommies each do. A whole social and moral framework has been neatly conveyed, and the chapter explores the young child's sophisticated comprehension.

Once it is clear that children are sensitive, aware people, and from very early on are rational moral agents, traditional research method and ethics have to be questioned. They have often ignored children's views and rights, have deceived, upset, and sometimes harmed children, such as in making secret records or case studies, or in the 'strange situation' and 'resistance to temptation' tests, which some psychologists criticise (Woodhead and Faulkner 2000). Ethical standards have been considered for years in medical research with children, and are beginning to be much more widely respected in social research with children (for a review see Alderson 1995; Alderson and Morrow 2003). A further step forward, led by children's organisations such as Save the Children, is the research increasingly conducted with and by children themselves in every continent (for a review see Alderson 2000d).

Puppets or persons

These new approaches and findings in childhood research and rights are still little known in Britain, although they are popular in other countries. The Childhood Centre at Otago University, New Zealand, regularly holds residential course for 200 (adult) child rights activists. Yet some authors continue to dismiss these new insights as not yet having sound research evidence (Moore 2000). Presumably this means that the theories and findings have not been researched by the old empirical and analytical methods that have been hostile to children, and have been criticised for their mistaken theories (Morss 1990, 1997; Donaldson 1978; Siegal 1990).

Although you need a huge elaborate project to prove that all children under 8 years cannot do something (although a negative can never be proved), a small study and a few examples can demonstrate that some ‘ordinary’ children can do that task competently, thus refuting the old generalisations.

Another barrier is when academics hanker after pristine abstract laws, as found in physics, and try to find these in social research. But whereas atoms have universal predictable properties and reactions, people do not. And yet the simplistic search for single over-arching causes for children’s abilities and behaviours, as if children are passive puppets twitched by causes or contexts, continues to attract most research funding. This section reviews the main presumed puppeteers that pull the strings of childhood.

‘*Nature or nurture?*’ is a favourite research question, raised by Galton who subtracted a third influence, divine intervention (Goodey 2003). It is criticised by many social and natural scientists as a false dichotomy, because nature and nurture overlap and interact so broadly and inextricably (Rose and Rose 2001).

‘*Genes or environment?*’ is a recent and more extreme version of this old debate, which reduces everything except the still invisible gene to one flat level: physical, material, social, personal or moral in children’s lives. A child’s family religion and type of baby food count for the same value. This question is mainly examined through twin studies developed by Burt at this Institute which, though highly contentious obtain large research grants (King’s College Newsletter, 146, March 2003). Both the above dichotomies tend to reduce children and young people to biological, hormonal, silent, reacting entities.

‘*Psychology or culture?*’ is another pair of headings, usually researched separately by different disciplines, one examining inner personal characteristics, psychometrics and reactions, such as from types of parenting, the other looking at contexts, such as tradition, history, education, law, values, ethics, the mass media and other many social institutions, each seeking separately to explain children’s behaviours.

Economics is, I suggest, the most powerful influence on childhood today, and it helps to explain the many strange and sometimes harmful ways that adults treat children and deny their rights. Children and young people have been withdrawn from our labour market (although many do unpaid and very low paid work), partly to stop them from undercutting adults’ opportunities and salaries, to conserve adults’ convenience and power, and partly to organise children’s training as future competitors in the global economy. Childhood is a state of social exclusion in

many ways, just as many women used to be excluded from public and economic life.

Adults' time is money as a resource. Children's time is free and therefore technically worthless (although children feel that they have very little free time and it very precious (Christensen 2002; Mayall 2002). Alternatively, their time is calculated for its costly dependence on adults' time and resources, or else it is counted in terms of investment for future value. Trevor Phillips's lecture for the Institute's centenary reduced childhood and schooling to the single outcome of 'life-chances' meaning adult earning power (Phillips 2003). The public services, of which children are major users, such as education, health and transport, are under-funded and over-crowded. Constructions of childhood in the mass media that portray children as victims, villains or problems are used to sell newspapers, to appeal for increased state funding (by teachers, doctors, social workers), and to justify government decisions about how they fund certain services such as crime control (Home Office 2003).

As children's earning power fell over the past century, their emotional value to parents rose (Zelitzer 1985). Industry and advertising have played a prominent part in reinventing childhood as dependent, needy, greedy, and divided into numerous expensive stages, each requiring different clothes, toys, entertainment and services. A recent addition is the multi-billion 'tweenage' market for 3–13 year old girls. It suits the economy when children watch advertisements on television instead of enjoying the now stigmatised free fun of playing with friends in street. Apart from market research, commissioned consultancies, and some work on poverty, it is hard to find funds to research the intense impact of economics on commodifying childhood.

In reality, children's lives are influenced by all the above seven puppets and a realistic understanding of childhood takes account of all of them, rather than trying artificially to separate them out and precisely to measure their relative influences. But children and adults' are not simply passive puppets as much of the above research claims or implies. They are also agents, people with their own strengths to choose and create and resist. They have partly though not completely free will. Young children have 'one hundred languages...a hundred thoughts...a hundred ways of listening, of marvelling, of loving, a hundred joys for singing and understanding'. School and culture steal 99 of these, and tell the child 'to listen and not speak, to understand without joy' but despite this, young children are 'strong and powerful' (Malaguzzi 1998:3).

Compulsion or voluntariness?

Adults highly value being able to make free democratic choices about how they live and work and vote, instead of being manipulated like puppets. We assume that adults work and learn well when they do so voluntarily, and they do so badly, if at all, when others try to force them against their will. Traditionally, children (as well as women (Mendus 1987)) have been seen as unable to make informed, wise, voluntary choices, and as needing to be compelled by their betters. When children's competence is recognised, many of the supposed differences between children and adults become uncertain or disappear. So why do we continue to treat children and young people almost as if they are another species, like obstinate

donkeys, that must be forced unwillingly to school? Surely it is time to respect children and their capacities and rights.

The importance of teachers respecting, listening and responding to young people as intelligent agents and learners is seriously advocated (Rudduck J et al 1996; Bentley 1998:1; Bayliss 1999; Stoll et al 2001; Jeffs 2002). Some secondary teachers have said they welcomed ‘voluntary informal’ contact with pupils when they could ‘relinquish the need for control and discipline...and status; they could relax and be themselves’, although in this research project, most teachers, 77 per cent, saw pupils sharing in the school development planning as not important. This had led some school improvers to call for more holistic, ecological, sustainable approaches and for ‘light institutionalisation’ that shifts ‘the focus to individual learners’ (Stoll et al 2001: 197-9). Many good details and examples are suggested for improving schools, but there is little attention to the main underlying obstruction.

We are still frozen into old views, expressed so clearly at this Institute by RS Peters and therefore summarised here from his work. Peters contrasted children with ‘autonomous men’ who are not ‘other-directed, manipulated puppets’ (Peters 1966:288-90). Unable to see how educators could bridge the chasm between the irrational child and the civilised man, apart from waiting for maturation as kindly as possible while trying to avoid teaching ‘tolerance of boredom and frustration’ (1981:42-8), Peters reluctantly concluded that ‘many children are [motivated] scarcely at all’ and regretted that ‘extrinsic interests and pressures have to be used’ (1967:11). He dismissed Dewey’s ideas on democratic schools as too romantic and idealised (1963: 80). Peters believed that a liberal education involves some ‘wittingness and voluntariness’ (1966:45), but he was trapped into old notions of the ‘barbarian’ child (1965:43), whose ““mind” is ruled perhaps by bizarre and formless wishes’ (1966:49). ‘There are missing those passions that help the individual to stick to any activity he is engaged in’ (1974:162-6). Peters, it seems, had never watched a baby absorbed in play. He accepted Freud’s and Piaget’s theories about childhood egoism, and pondered how to get young children to ‘overcome their passions and self-love’ so that they respect others, and how teachers might ‘sustain and cultivate a crust of civilisation over the volcanic core of atavistic emotions’ (1972: 87).

I recently had tea at 2 year old Amy’s house. She walked around looking into the teacups, asking the adults, ‘You like some little bit more?’ When they finished, unasked she took the cups into the kitchen, then held the door open. While I waited for her to go first she said, ‘I holding the door for you,’ (and see Tizard and Hughes 1984; Dunn 1988; Edwards et al 1998; Mayall 2002: 87-111 for research about young children’s thinking, morality and altruism). Peters, however, averred that infants in their ‘twilight world’ (1967:11), although they can feel empathy (1959:151), have ‘no knowledge of right or wrong’, they cannot yet value fairness and respect, (1959:151-6) and it ‘does not begin to dawn until 7 or 8 years that there are reasons for rules’ (1966:314). So why are fairness and kindness hot topics in young children’s discussions, and ‘why?’ a favourite word with them? Yet children are still seen as ‘persons in the making’ not ‘the best or even the most appropriate guardians of their own interests...they need protection from

themselves as well as from others' (Brighouse 2000:11). These old ideas continue to influence twenty-first century schools and to inhibit new thinking.

Conclusion

At the end of his novel *Vanity Fair*, Thackery says to his readers, 'Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for our play is played out' (1847:733). This paper, which is nearly played out, concerns trying to close away old ideas of children as puppets, to make space for children as persons. I began by asking:

What can adults do that children cannot do?

At what age can children start to do activities that are often seen as 'adult' ones?

What is the difference between children and adults?

If you thought before reading this paper that there were clear and large differences between adulthood and childhood, I hope that now you believe there are considerable overlaps, and that many of the differences result from how we (mis) perceive and treat children rather than from children's actual capacities. Perhaps you will also agree that a rigid double standard, of respect and rights for adults, and compulsion and control for children, is neither principled nor productive. How can we possibly encourage children to be responsible agents, as many school brochures claim, by treating them as helpless dependents hemmed in by many rigid rules, often listed in the brochures? We might as well expect frogs to turn magically into princes, and drudges into princesses (Griffith 1998).

This is an 'inaugural' lecture, a rite that implies that a new youngish professor inaugurates or institutes a programme of work for the next 20 to 30 years. I do not have that long time ahead of me, and so instead I will propose a programme that I hope the Institute will inaugurate – plan and develop - over the next century. As we have seen, dominant thinking in the Institute over the past century has taken some mistaken turnings about the nature of childhood and education. Instead, in the twenty-first century, we could take more heed of Marion Richardson's faith in 'sincere free' relationships, and in those nineteenth century working people's respect for education where the learners would 'go first and the master would follow' (Godwin 1797). These ideals are practised to some extent in some Italian early years centres, Rajasthan night schools, Columbian schools (Hart 2003), and in some schools in Britain and around the world (Apple and Beane 1999).

Surely universities are places for exploring new and alternative ideas carefully, instead of dismissing them. The philosopher Mary Midgley (1996) compares thinking with plumbing. Beliefs and pipes tend to be invisible and ignored until something goes obviously wrong, such as leaks or blockages. Then the importance of hidden pipes, or hidden assumptions, becomes clear, and the most practical thing to do is to sort out the (mental) plumbing. Instead of simply suggesting new techniques or practices to improve schools, at the level of patching leaks, it is time to look more deeply at what is going wrong and why. Unlike 1902, 2003 is a time when British adults assume that their rights, choices and responsibilities should be respected. Childhood has been left behind in a historical limbo and this has skewed relationships and double standards between the institutions of childhood and adulthood. It is as if a great dam has grown higher over the past century to exclude children and young people into separate channels away from mainstream society. Adults claim that this is to protect and cherish children, but the system can very

much harm children, young people and adults, though it tends mainly to serve adults' economic and political interests.

Suppose we took seriously the hope that there are better ways for children and adults to work together in schools, such as in the words of the Danish law that schools must 'build on intellectual freedom, equality and democracy' (Davies and Kirkpatrick 2000:22). A logical step is that school attendance would become voluntary instead of compulsory. The vast majority of children and young people would attend school voluntarily for three reasons they value very highly besides learning: to gain necessary training and qualifications for the next stages of education and employment; to enjoy time with their friends; and to have opportunities and resources especially for the arts and sports (Alderson and Arnold 1999). Most children start school eager and able to learn. Black children, particularly, do very well at first and then fall behind (Gillborn and Youdell 2000). With the fall in interest in secondary schools already noted, this suggests that many problems may arise in schools rather than at home. The benefits of voluntary attendance would include respect for students as the informed 'consumers' or, far better, co-creators in their education, supported by their parents and carers, besides a creative, positive, welcoming ethos. So much time, frustrated energy, and wasted resources could be re-channelled into working with the majority instead of trying to work against a resistant minority. That would release many teachers from administration back into teaching, with better teacher-student ratios, resulting in more personal and rewarding relationships. There would be more time to help the small minority who are unhappy, resistant or absent, and to work with them towards solutions, whether the difficulty is with reading or maths, bullying from children or adults, parents who keep them at home too much, or other problems (for example, Katz 2002).

There could be a programme of research and teaching to address the advantages and problems associated with voluntary school attendance, and to support the necessary new policies and practices. In the programme, children, young people and adults would share the responsibility to:

- rethink the meaning and relevance of childhood and children's competencies and rights;
- work to plan better curricula, real learning and teaching, and improved teacher training;
- map new approaches to education itself and to schooling that can accommodate a new mutual respect and voluntary (willing) partnerships between learners and teachers;
- plan how to prevent and resolve problems;
- devise new effective systems of intrinsic rewards, credits, and paced flexible learning for core and optional subjects;
- wrestle with the challenges of trying to combine liberty, equality and solidarity in schools;
- recognise children as contributors and resources, instead of assuming that respecting their rights means increasing their expensive dependence;
- seek to change society's treatment of and attitudes towards children and young people – the views of parents, 'experts', journalists, politicians and all others who influence public opinions and policies.

Children can see through the current hypocrisy of repressive schools and token school councils. 'We get played like fools,' they say (Morrow 2002). An 8 year old girl succinctly summarised how rights are trivialised and distanced, in vain attempts to conceal how children's rights are disrespected in schools: 'It's so boring when they keep telling you that making the world a better place means picking up litter and not killing whales.' (Alderson and Arnold 1999; Alderson 1999). The aim of changing the blocked plumbing of compulsion, and rigid though ineffectual control, into new channels of shared willing human agency would be that, whatever future forms schools take, all children and young people and adults will be able to flourish in civilised, respectful and caring communities. In the words of the UNCRC, respecting the inherent worth and dignity and the inalienable rights of all members of the human family promotes social progress and better standards of life in larger freedoms, and lays foundations for justice and peace in the world.

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